

Video: Former UN official Craig Mokhiber on Gaza, Israel and Genocide

Human rights expert says UN must hold Israel accountable for its military actions in Gaza.

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Craig Mokhiber, a top United Nations human rights official who stepped down at the weekend over the organisation's response to the war in Gaza, has called on the UN to attach the same standards to Israel as it does when assessing human rights violations in other countries around the world.

Mokhiber, who was the director of the New York office of the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, wrote in his October 28 resignation letter that [Israel's military actions in Gaza](#) were "textbook genocide" and accused the UN of again "failing" to act, referring to previous genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda, and [Myanmar](#).

The UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights disputes Mr. Mokhiber's characterisation that he resigned. It claims he retired.

Mokhiber, an international human rights lawyer, had been with the UN since 1992 and worked previously as a human rights adviser in Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territories.

At least 8,805 Palestinians have been [killed in Israeli attacks](#) in Gaza since October 7 after the armed group Hamas launched a surprise assault on Israel, killing at least 1,400 people and taking more than 200 people captive.

"The current wholesale slaughter of the Palestinian people, rooted in an ethno-nationalist colonial-settler ideology, in continuation of decades of their systematic persecution and purging, based entirely upon their status as Arabs ... leaves no room for doubt," Mokhiber said in his letter to the UN human rights chief, Volker Turk.

Al Jazeera's correspondent at the UN, Gabriel Elizondo, sat down with Mokhiber in New York.

He asked him about his assessment of the situation in Gaza and the chances of a two-state solution.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Al Jazeera: Why did you come to conclusion that the situation in Gaza amounts to a genocide?

Craig Mokhiber: Usually the most difficult part of proving genocide is intent because there has to be an intention to destroy in whole, or in part, a particular group. In this case, the intent by Israeli leaders has been so explicitly stated and publicly stated – by the prime minister, by the president, by senior cabinet ministers, by military leaders – that that is an easy case to make. It's on the public record.

It's important that we start using the language that the law sets out, just as you know, in recent times, every major international human rights organisation, Israeli human rights organisations, Palestinian human rights organisations, United Nations human rights mechanisms, independent mechanisms have found that the situation in Israel Palestine amounts to the crime of apartheid.

The UN needs to get used to addressing these particular violations, just as we have in other situations.

Al Jazeera: When we asked the secretary-general and his office about genocide, he won't use that term. He says a previous secretary-general said that that is for courts to decide. Do you think that the secretary-general should start using the term 'genocide' when it comes to what we're seeing in Gaza?

Mokhiber: If we can allege that we see war crimes, crimes against humanity, as we have often done, there's no reason to exclude, where we see very strong evidence, the possibility of genocide being committed, and I think you're going to be hearing that term more and more in connection with what we're witnessing in Gaza.

But institutions, of course, have to go through the necessary steps before they can make that pronouncement. As of today, I am an independent citizen, not carrying the institution on my shoulders. And I feel quite confident as a human rights lawyer in saying that what I see unfolding in Gaza and beyond is genocide.

Al Jazeera: [US President] Joe Biden has recently said that after this conflict is over, we need to get back to a two-state solution. In your letter, you say the mantra of a two-state solution has become, and I quote, an open joke in the corridors of the United Nations where we are sitting right now. Is it really an open joke in the corridors of the United Nations?

Mokhiber: Yes, and it has been for quite a long time, if you ask somebody in their official capacity about the two states, and they will repeat that phrase over and over again as the official position of the United Nations. Indeed, that is the official position of the United States. But nobody who follows these circumstances either from the political side or from the human rights side believes that a two-state solution is possible anymore.

There's nothing left for a Palestinian state that would be sustainable or just or were possible

in any respect, and everyone knows that.

And secondly, that solution never dealt with the problem of the fundamental human rights of Palestinians. So for example, it would leave them as second-class citizens without full human rights inside what is now Israel proper.

And so when people are not talking from official talking points, you hear increasingly about a one-state solution.

And what that means is beginning to advocate for the principle of equality of human rights instead of these old political taglines, that would mean a state in which we'll have equal rights for Christians, Muslims and Jews, based upon human rights and based upon the rule of law. It is what we call for in every other circumstance around the world. And the question is, why is the United Nations not going for that in Israel and Palestine?

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